CALVERT

Student Publications

CALVERT

Spring 1989

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EDITORS

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College Park, Maryland 20742

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Laura Bellows-Ancasi

Absence, For Elio

I remember us in Santa Catalina.
You were hours my husband.
We walked through the convent taking photographs
of so many doorways, the nun closing
and locking them behind us as if she

wanted to trap us there for the night.
The pictures look, now, like a different place,
the shadows deeper, the rooms leading back,
seductive, like a labyrinth.
I look into them as if I might enter,

come out in Arequipa in late afternoon
and walk around until night-fall
when I would take a taxi out of the city
to your brother's house in Sachaca to meet you
as if I never left. But I am here, still,

and you are in Peru though we were
together then, late in the day, the light
slanting across the courtyard
with the blue wall and the orange
trees — a green humming bird in the branches

of one — planted in huge clay pots not as large
as the split urns the nuns used
as basins for doing their wash.
The halves, each one a large, concave disk
of dark clay, were placed next to one another

along a shallow trough of running water.
There was a small hole that would let
the water run into the basin when
a nun placed her hand in the trough
as a dam. When the nuns washed themselves

they bathed standing to their necks in cold
water in a stone tub with four steps
leading into it and wore long linen
robes so they wouldn't see their own bodies.
You told me once, as we lay naked

on the bed, that the women from your country,
even after making love, cover themselves
to their chins with the blankets.
My body barely remembers you.
And even when I call you, our voices

stretched out for a while across the distance,
you are farther away than the hours
I spent on the plane leaving you.
Sometimes I can see us walking,
at night, from your brother's house, two blocks over

To Elena's room where we will sleep,
the lights of the city spread out
before us, between us and the volcano
and though I don't see you next to me, I hear
our footsteps, sometimes together, sometimes not.

Colleen K. Cotter

After the Beep

It was an unusually warm autumn afternoon and I had just returned from the florist. I had ordered a few brightly colored flowers to be sent to Florida, where my grandma lay in a hospital bed. She had been ill off and on for what seemed like a long time. But then so had I. I had had a couple minor surgeries and had been combatting various maladies off and on for two years. We used to compare medications and casually bitch about what bastards doctors could be and how taxing and scary it was to be out of sorts for so long. I remember she used to tell me, "You'll never forget your junior year." She was right. She would also hint that I should come south the next time I had some vacation time. I had already decided to go down over Thanksgiving break and surprise her. But November would have been too late. She died in late October, the week after the stock market crash and the night before her birthday.

When I come home I throw my backpack wherever it is convenient and then I carefully place my keys in the same place everytime. That way I can always find them later, or at least in theory. After performing this ritual, I rewind the messages on the machine and listen to the recording. I was listening to the messages with one ear as I thumbed through the afternoon mail. I looked up from all the little windowed envelopes from distant credit companies to hear my dad's voice on the tape. He was rambling, which was unusual, considering he tends to be pretty direct.

I paused the tape to answer the phone. Funny how the technology we invent to make life simpler ends up controlling us in the end. It was my brother; he wanted to know what I planned to do. I planned to ignore my bills, make a snack, and do some studying. He wasn't satisfied with my answer. He insisted, "You know, what are you going to do? Can I go with you?" Go where I thought? What was the matter with him and why was he cussing so much? He knew I didn't like it.

There was some commotion and a familiar maternal, "Give me that!" My mother came on the line sounding very distressed trying to appear cool. She demanded to know what I was going to do. At this point I was overly confused. I said, "For the millionth time, what the hell are you talking about?" My mother blurted out, "Your grandmother's funeral will probably be this weekend. Are you taking your brother in the car or are you going to fly?"

I felt like someone had just stopped the clock; my quarter had run out in the viewfinder. Everything stood still. I dropped the mail. I didn't say anything. I had just been shot out of a huge sling-shot and was flying above a land that had once been filled with life, racing above a silent forest where absent wildlife once roamed. I fell slowly, feeling empty and stunned. Unable to cushion my fall, I landed hard. Very hard.

"Oh, I guess you didn't know. Well, your brother saw your father at his office and he told him. He has already taken Eastern down."

My mother has this unusual manner of speaking when she is nervous. She sounds like an inexperienced foreign correspondent dodging fire in a war-zone. She even bobs her head sideways as if trying to follow an unsteady cameraman. She continued to blurt demands at me in this fashion, which I didn't pay much attention to. Between orders I agreed to come over later to make plans with my brother. I slowly hung up the phone as if it had been made of Irish crystal.

With some hesitation I flipped the pause button on the answering machine. My father's voice came on the recording again. It was awful knowing what he was about to say. It was like seeing a horror movie the second time. The first time you're cocky; the second time you're terrified because you know what to expect. After talking about nothing in particular, he sort of mentioned that my grandmother had died shortly after surgery. He said he was afraid that might have happened. I was appalled that he would leave such a message and not wait to tell me in person. I found out later that he didn't even remember calling because he had told my brother that I already knew. He explained that the funeral wasn't going to be flashy and that it was not at all necessary for my brother and I to attend. In fact, he seemed somewhat against the idea of our presence at the affair. He said he would be gone for a few days but he would tell me what happened when he returned.

I listened to that message over and over again. Each time it stabbed through me and struck bone. I hadn't much experience with death. When my Aunt Monica died, my grandmother's sister, I cried a lot. But then I was only about eight or nine years old at the time. It was a sticky evening with a definite weight and clinging odor typical of Washington summers. It was late and I was lying in front of a primitive pre-World War II fan in sweat-soaked cotton underwear. The talcum powder had surrendered. My dad came into my room to tell me Aunt Monica had just died of cancer. I guess carrying bad tidings is a low point of his paternal role. I thought for a moment, realized the finality, and started to cry. He brought me a Tylenol and large glass of tap water which instantly covered with condensation. My dad explained that Monica had not been feeling well for a long time and that now she could rest. Where was she resting? Was there really a heaven for her to go to? Does she know I am crying? My dad carefully fielded all sorts of these questions.

This time he was just a recorded message, like Sears calling to say your sock and pajama order is in and won't you please come pick it up. Sometimes when their computer calls I find myself talking back to it like an idiot. "I can't come in until Tuesday; is that all right? Was that flannel nightgown with the penguin pattern in stock?" Of course the computer doesn't answer. It can't. The answering machine can't talk back either. I don't talk to it like I do to Sears, probably because it never calls me. It just hypnotically blinks little red lights like an overheated car on a highway shoulder. You either drive past or you stop to see what the frustrated driver

has to say. I wish I had floored the gas that afternoon and not stopped to listen.

The strange thing is I still have the same questions. Only nowadays nobody sits on the corner of my bed, sweating in front of a fan with me, trying to figure out these puzzles. I'm older now and supposed to fit my own pieces together. I don't think I'm much smarter, however. The questions are just as hard, if not harder. I can form the border, but I can't fill in the pieces.

I guess some people look to religion to guide them through these dilemmas. Supposedly religion can differentiate between the variances in shading. It holds clues to the grey areas while holding firm to the polar black and whites. I skipped a lot of catechism. Aside from the intense boredom, I also firmly believed I could learn more on my own. I didn't need the Church to tax me with biased arguments I'd already heard at home. Instead, I used to head towards Georgetown University, where the classes were held, and then as if by automatic pilot I'd head down the hill, past the Exorcist Stairs, and stumble down to M Street. I spent most of the time looking at clothes I couldn't afford and drinking unmercifully strong coffee, the fuel of late night political discussions between friends which inevitably blossom into heated circular debates, slammed doors, and apologetic phone calls the next morning. I loitered in student cafes, squinted through the Times, and wondered about things.

I'd wonder and daydream and then return to the Volkswagon where my mother was waiting, also reading the Times, devouring overpriced croissants, and probably also wondering about things, but never, never drinking coffee. She'd systematically inquire how class went. Following script, I'd say it was very unchallenging, Sunday is supposed to be my day off from school, and I'd reiterate that I wanted to quit. She would stiffly remind me that the decision was up to her, turn on some annoying country western station, which my brother and I both openly and adamantly despised, and I would gaze out the window and return to wondering. We didn't talk much on the way home. My mother sang along with the broadcast. And my brother would play with his "Hot Wheels" and "Star Wars" figures making lewd and suggestive noises in the back seat. Communion aside, this was our Sunday family ritual.

Although Sundays were supposed to be religious in nature according to my mother, I rarely considered anything remotely divine. After all, it was the weekend. I must have missed something by spending so much time wandering around window shopping and tourist spotting. Maybe my more pious and less adventurous peers have the answers. Maybe they can fill in the grey areas of the puzzle. They must be able to get beyond the broader pieces. Now I wonder if they know something I don't — if perhaps I missed something. Maybe they can answer the questions I formulated as an eight year old and still can't come close to answering. Maybe by avoiding caffeine injections and inky hands, they learned something I can't figure out.

Each question leads into another one. It is a circle of the unanswerable. Do those people have the same questions or were the keys divulged to them while I was fumbling to open tiny containers of cream without spilling

telltale stains onto my clothes? Did they learn where the answers to these questions are hidden? Maybe I should stop wondering and try to call some of these people. And while we are catching up, I'll casually ask where the answers are. Maybe they will know. Or maybe they have the same questions and I am not alone with a pile of jagged pieces and a skeleton boarder. I will tell them if they do get the answers or know someone who does, I'd appreciate a note. I'd say call me, but I'm never home and I've unplugged the answering machine. It started calling Sears long distance.

Gustavo Acosta

Photographs

BUSCH

Ma. Fatima V. Lim

The Louise Gluck Reading

Moth-thin, her voice flits
Through the room. First, settling upon
A professor's dry left cheek,
His crossed knee, then, squarely,
Upon the star of my palm.
No one moves. To stir
Is to break the spell.
We would only drive back
The moth into the nets
Invisible between her lines.
How could we even venture
A cough or a single twitch
Of a muscle when already,
Her folk was coming in
Stepping starkly as out
Of oil portraits
Or daguerreotype prints:
Her father, who long before death
Chose his flower-flooded home
As the plot of his grave.
Her aunt whose cruel resoluteness
Was no, not cunning
But kindness. Her mother
Whose secret in each domestic victory
Lay in letting go.
And the sister,
Her most beloved sister
Who would forever be
The wound aching at her side.
She comes in, pale as a bride
Her hair aflame with a crown
of garden flowers.
When it is over,
We mill about the poet
From some distance,
Half-afraid to bump
Into her kin, or to fill in
Our own loved absences.

All about us,
The pastoral paintings glisten.
Each now holds
In the heart of its greenery:
Shimmering, a ghost-white moth.

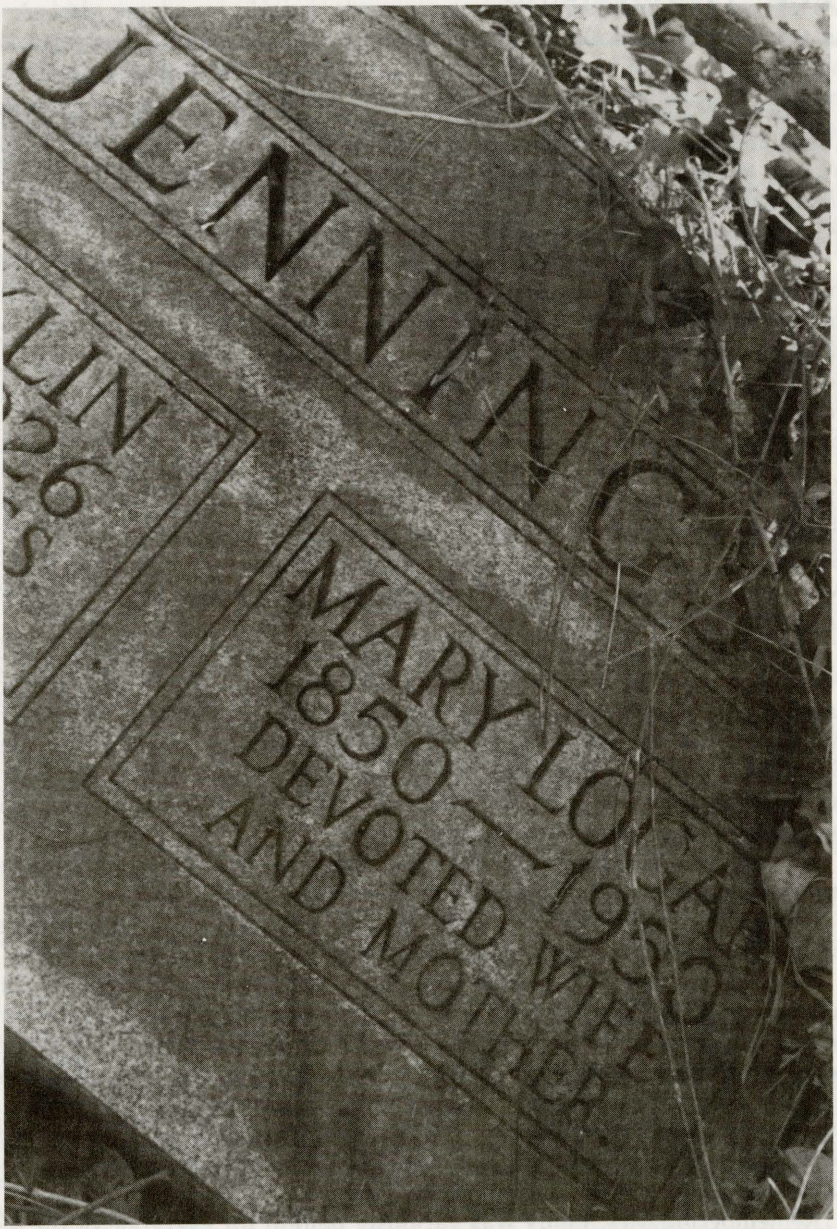
Nancy Surprenant

Sympathy

Walking to the graveyard
I think of my mother's mother
abuelita
and how I visited her as a child.
She let me unpin her downy white hair
from the bun at the nape of her neck
three braids unfurling down her back.
I brushed them out
as she told me stories
about her parents
hard brown pictures to me
of age itself.
Sitting in the graveyard
my back against a tombstone
my legs stretched out before me
I think of her buried now
outside Trujillo in Peru
in a wall
a piece of metal tucked
lovingly inside her mouth,
the custom of the Moche.
By now the metal has settled
deep inside the tunnel
of her gullet. Lying here
arms folded across my chest
eyes closed
death is a good game
like in the fourth grade
when my friend Scott called me
spic and I smiled hard
not knowing what he meant
my silence emerging like stones
or cotton from my mouth.

Laura Bellows-Ancasi

Photograph



MaryAnn S. Suehle

The Tree-Raising

Whenever I go to visit my mother, I stand on the top step of our front porch and look again at the same things I always do just before going inside. Across the street, the Williams' front yard looks bare where a rhododendron once grew. Next door to them, the Eviks have had their house done with aluminum siding, almond. It used to be green shingle.

Some of the houses belong to new families, though we never let go of the old names. "Did you see the weeds taking over Mrs. Emily's lilies?" I asked my mother inside. Mrs. Emily's house had been the large three-story next door to us. It towered over our squat cape cods and looked like a mansion to us. Hubert, Mrs. Emily's husband, had always kept the black shutters freshly painted so that they looked nice against the white shingles. Mrs. Emily had surrounded it with mulched beds of only white and blue flowers.

"Oh, I don't know, Anne. The Perkins woman doesn't do much with them," my mother said in answer. "She's young with a couple of kids. The husband works all day and she works at night. A nurse down at Franklin Square. Suppose that's the only way a young couple like that could afford Mrs. Emily's house." All of this while my mother kneaded bread dough on the floured tablecloth.

My mother was a storehouse of neighborhood information. In the days when Stuart Street was a tight community of proud, blue-collar worker families, she was one of the group of gossipy women at its core. Since then, many of the street matriarchs have moved away to their retirement homes. Some have lost their husbands and moved in with daughters and sons-in-law. Still others have found new lives in the tiny apartments of surrounding neighborhoods, after a long-awaited divorce.

My mother, still kneading the dough, communicated the information to me as if I had been Mrs. Caroline or one of the others.

"At least the spruce looks good," I said, referring to the tree in Mrs. Emily's front yard. "It grew so tall this year." I waited for her response.

She looked up, but her hands kept working the dough. In my adolescence, I had grown slightly taller than she, but she still leveled her brown eyes at me as if she were ready to correct a child. It had the same effect on me, this expression of hers, perhaps because her eyes lit up the cheeks that had become puffy with age and her nose looked narrower and straighter on her kerchiefed face. It was the same kerchief she always wore, brown and cotton, though fraying at the edges now where the hem had fallen out.

Remembering Mrs. Emily was variously painful for everyone of the old neighborhood. As for the tree, yet living after both she and Hubert had died, it spread its arms above our rooftops, recalling to us an incident that

some would rather have remained forgotten.

We talked of other things.

As kids, we thought Hubert the neatest man on the block. He was like the bachelor uncle who never quite became an adult. He was so short that he would become lost among our group, especially when Charlie Stringfellow, Mrs. Caroline's eldest and the tallest of our group, hung around. Hubert was bald, though, and his shiny head gave him away in our crowd. He was bulky, too, among our slender bodies but not fat.

He loved ice cream in the summer and stopped the Good Humor truck nearly every time it went by. He would stall the driver by asking for raspberry cream or peach, flavors that, as the sign on the side of the truck clearly showed, the Good Humor man did not carry.

The rest of us would run home to get money. Most of the time we would buy the same flavor or choose between two or three of our favorites. Mine was plain chocolate fudge, but Missy had to try a different one every time. We would hang back from the truck and try to guess which one it would be. Hubert usually guessed the right flavor.

After the truck sped down the street, ringing its bells, we would sit down on the curb with Hubert. He always finished his chocolate nut eclair first, but would wait for us so that he could collect our wrappers and sticks. He loved to make things — ships and airplanes mostly, but sometimes a table lamp or serving tray — by gluing the sticks together.

"You go on with your work and I'll go on with mine," he might say, wiping his mouth again with a generous sweep of his white handkerchief. He would start back to the yard where he was trimming hedges or painting Mrs. Emily's flower boxes.

We would try to get him to play Spud or Red Rover. He could break through anyone's clasped hands, though sometimes he would pretend that he couldn't. You never knew how the game was going to turn out when Hubert played.

"Weelll," he might say, over our "Oh, come on." He would look back at the house first.

Later, we figured out that if we could see Mrs. Emily looking out at the window, he would say he was too busy.

My young impressions of Mrs. Emily were that she was a witch. Later, I continued to regard her fearfully though then I thought she was probably only crazy.

I like to believe, in remembering Mrs. Emily, that I was always somewhat sympathetic toward her, that, perversely taking the side against the majority, as I tend to do, I always gave her a fair chance. Perhaps because I believed myself to be on the edge of the neighborhood group, I've always felt something for those left out on the periphery.

My older brother concluded, "She's a classic. Look at that hair. And the way she looks at you, like she's muttering incantations or something."

I thought he might be right. Her hair was a long coarse mane that had

been black but was fading to a dark gray. She pinned it in a tight knot behind her head. She had silver, wire-framed glasses. The strong prescription partially obscured her blue eyes, which appeared, nervously, to puzzle over the world detail by detail. She looked brittle and bony, though she could not have been much beyond sixty.

She hid in that house most of the time and, I suppose, that was partly the cause of her reputation. My mother's group enjoyed nothing more, once past the business of the day, than talking about Mrs. Emily. She piqued their curiosity. She was a mystery to be solved.

"It was only the other day that I saw her working out in the garden," my mother said into the telephone. She cradled it on her shoulder to free her hands for folding clothes.

"It was Tuesday or Wednesday, I think. No, it couldn't have been Monday, I didn't see the light of day Monday, what with the house in the shape it always is after a week-end. Does yours get that way, too? You'd never know that I clean around here if you saw the place on Monday morning. So I let the wash go that day because once I got everything to rights it was time to make dinner. Then by Tuesday it seemed I had double the laundry. So I guess it must have been Wednesday I saw her out there in the garden, because I remember I was all ready to go out for groceries. I had put on some half-decent clothes and was walking out to the car. There she was in the garden, kneeling on that mat of hers and gloves on so she wouldn't get any dirt on her." She interrupted her story to laugh.

"Oh, I know," she replied and continued. "So I said, 'Good morning to you, Mrs. Emily' and walked up to the fence like I was waiting to talk. But she kept right on working. Then I said, 'Hey, Mrs. Emily, nice day to be working outside.' You know, Caroline, she didn't even turn around, just waved her hand at me and kept up what she was doing."

"You want me to give you something to do?" my mother whispered to me across the living room. In one quick motion she had rolled the phone off of her shoulder and closed the mouthpiece over with her hand.

"Yeah, well I know, but I always say there's no harm in trying to be friendly," she talked back into the phone. She had pushed the basket of clothes toward me and was shooing me away. She pointed toward the kitchen.

I could have gotten out of folding the clothes if I would have just run off. I did that all of the time, but I had wanted to hear what was said. I loved to listen to the talk, had to hear it when I was around.

" 'Those lily of the valley smell sweet,' I said, I thought that might get her attention," my mother continued in the living room. She was intent on her story now that I had taken over folding the clothes.

"By now, she had stood up and was looking at me with those eyes of hers, you know how they always seem squinting at you. 'Do they just keep multiplying like that every year,' I said, 'or do you keep buying more?'

" 'No,' she said, it's the first word I've gotten out of her the whole time, 'lilies of the valley are bulbs, each bulb divides itself in two,' she said just

like a teacher I had one time. We use to call her Miss Crabby, though I think her name was Krebs.

" 'Well, I sure would like to have a couple,' I said. I know, I know, I was just pushing and pushing her along, just to see how far it would go. I don't know what got into me that day, but really, I had been meaning to ask Hubert if I could have some of them. It looks like they are taking over her garden anyway. She wouldn't have missed a dozen or so. So she stoops back down in the dirt and digs up one plant, there were two bulbs attached, and she marches right over to the fence and holds them out to me, like she was really giving me something. There was nothing for me to do but take them from her, as dirty and muddy as they were, and me ready to go out and everything. So I took those two stinky old bulbs, wrapped them up in some wet newspaper, and haven't touched them since. They are there to this day, probably all dried out, too.

"Well I don't know what she thought I was going to do with them right then.

"I did thank her, but hardly, because she was marching back into the house before I could say much of anything.

"You know what I'm thinking of doing? Telling Hubert. No, just saying that Mrs. Emily gave me two lily bulbs and they got dried out, could I have some more. Bet he'd give me some worth planting. That man. He'd work all afternoon digging some up here and there, then he'd go and plant them for me too. He's just too good for her instead of it being the other way around."

I wanted to believe that there was more to Mrs. Emily than this talk allowed. There had to be something more behind her abrupt, imperious nature than pride, I thought, taking her side again without really meaning to.

Eventually, the whole neighborhood thought they had figured out Mrs. Emily's story. Hubert himself had good-naturedly acknowledged their only child as his step-daughter without knowing, in his naive way, to what use it might be put. And the daughter, Marcie, was fond it seemed, when the mood struck her, of throwing out bits of information. I remember my mother talking with Marcie over the fence and over Marcie's pregnant belly. She was then seventeen.

Marcie must have hated her mother. Whatever might further Mrs. Emily's discomfort in the neighborhood, Marcie did. Before she got pregnant, she would go out in the evenings "dressed like a prostitute." She went bra-less in the summers. On some occassions, my father would see her sleeping off a wild party on Mrs. Emily's front steps as he left for work in the morning.

When she got pregnant, she moved in with another man, who was not the father of her child, she was sure to let my mother know. Swollen and very pregnant, Marcie came back to visit Mrs. Emily. She waved to the neighbors, even hailed my mother to the fence, just to talk about it.

It seemed, Marcie was doing the same things her mother must have done at that age, at least that was what the neighborhood figured. Mrs. Emily

must have gotten pregnant with Marcie before she got married, then couldn't get the father to marry her, so married Hubert instead. Why else would Mrs. Emily marry the assistant manager at one of her father's stores? Why would a family like the Stuarts give the house to Mrs. Emily, sell the land around it to developers, and abandon their daughter to lower, middle class life? "And Mrs. Emily acting like she was so much better than everyone." She wasn't any better after all, worse, in the minds of most of the neighborhood women, who had married honestly. Now that we had figured her out, we would see who would be abrupt with whom.

It was the kind of day that makes me tired of winter. The light was constant from morning until afternoon, and then it would get dark by five. The trees were stickly and bare, the grass, dead, and though it was still cold, it only rained and froze on the ground. The grass crunched as I walked.

I had decided to take the dog for a walk, which, as I thought about it, depressed me because I only did it when I was utterly bored and feeling sorry for myself for being so.

There are woods the entire length of the street behind our houses. The developers sold it to the church at the end of the street because it was too marshy to build on. For about eight weeks in the spring the woods are flooded in shallow pools that lie right up to the back of our fence. The woods are an anomaly in our suburban community. A piece of ground even as small as that which the woods were on could not help but be improved. But we were glad to have them. It was a nice place to be.

The other kids had decided to play touch football in the street. I just didn't care to play and made so many mistakes the team began to complain. Hubert offered to take my place on the team so that they would leave me alone.

"You just go on your walk," he said, coming away from the street with his arm around me, "or whatever you're going to do. I'll stay here and play until you want to jump in again."

I was glad to get away, but looked up at the front windows of Mrs. Emily's house and hoped he wouldn't get into trouble.

The dog strained at the leash, excited that I was taking her out. Ginger knew that I would go all the way down to the swamp, the farthest boundary of the woods. It wasn't really a swamp, like the kind in Georgia, but it was good enough to be called a swamp in the suburbs of Baltimore. It was actually an old river that was drying up. The rain water could keep it filled in the warm months, but in the winter, the sludge bottom was bare and connected our woods to the apartment complexes on the other shore.

My brother had warned me not to walk on it, that it was like quick-sand. He said that Tommy had tried to cross it once and had sunk up to his waist. He and some of the others had thrown logs out in the mud, end to end, to make a bridge so they could pull him out. Tommy caught it when he got home. I think he was grounded for a week.

I had no desire to get to the other side of the swamp. With the kind of people that lived in those apartments, who knew what would happen? On

Friday and Saturday nights, the police were always screaming by our street, their lights and sirens going, to get back to those apartments. Sometimes they had the helicopters come out with their search lights and scan the woods. Those apartment people, they were always robbing a liquor store or stabbing someone.

I chose the path that led the long way around to the swamp where I could see that the water had cut into the land. In places, pools of stagnant water had been left behind and had frozen. The trail led away from the neighborhood houses. I wanted a long, undisturbed walk. Besides, the scent Ginger had taken up went this way.

I walked along with the leash around my wrist and my hands in the pockets of my flannel jacket. It was a boy's jacket and, though I had to learn how to button it every time I put it on, I loved it because it was practical, with good-sized pockets where I wanted them and a small hood. It was a subdued red, not candy pinkish and sweet. The color looked natural to me.

Ginger became more and more intent upon the trail she had picked up, and she strained at the leash. I slowed down hoping she wouldn't catch sight of whatever it was she followed because she would be off like a bullet. She was small for a boxer but strong. No one could hold her back when she started on a run.

We had almost reached the swamp when she turned off of the path and headed down an embankment. I tramped behind her through the dry, frozen leaves, figuring that the noise we made would warn the animals out of our way. Ginger went off on another, little-used path. These were common in our woods, but they usually dead-ended among empty beer cans, perhaps where the apartment complex kids had partied. This one zigzagged along the embankment, first in one direction, then in another. Ginger stubbornly kept her nose to the path, not missing a single turn. Finally, we pushed through the branches of some thick shrubbery.

I stepped carefully through the bushes and into the small enclosure. The leaves had been raked from the ground and I had a view of the entire swamp and the ridge with the apartments. A rusting chain dangled just in my reach. I was catching it up in my hand before I realized that someone else was there.

I looked over at the rock I had brushed past and was not less frightened to see Mrs. Emily seated there. All of my better thoughts of her were forgotten for the surprise of finding her there. How horrible it was to me that she looked so grey, bloodless almost. It was no wonder that I had missed her before.

I remembered thinking later that she was probably as startled to see me as I was to see her. The place had been hidden for all the years I had walked back there, and she had probably assumed that I would not find it now. Confronted with each other, we hardly knew what to say. Had we not been startled, she would be sure to have said nothing, and I probably would have said something polite.

"So you've found me out," she said in her disapproving tone.

I was about to apologize and move on.

"Well, since you have," Mrs. Emily continued, "you might as well know, this is where I would come when I was a young girl." She pronounced the endings of her words like a teacher to be sure that you heard. She appeared to have already regained her composure. He neat little body moved carefully off of the rock. Her shoulders were square, her back straight. Everything about her said, "I am good, I am better." Knowing all I thought I knew about her, I was embarassed.

She went over to the rusty chain, still swinging from when I had disturbed it earlier. She made it still and said, "It was part of our swing. My father liked to take his lunch out here. The river was beautiful then, before the houses were built. We'd take a boat out to the other side. The wild flowers were such a sight. Sometimes, we would forget to come back in time for dinner and would pick our way in the dark."

I had drawn Ginger's leash in tight so that we could get out of there. When she looked around at me I said, "I have to go." It was all that I could muster at the time. I turned the dog around and plunged through the bushes.

I felt bad for the way I had acted. I wished that I would have been more at ease, more polite at least. I had been abrupt with her, she must not think much of me.

I didn't go back to the swamp much after that. I kept thinking that I might see Mrs. Emily back there. Even if I didn't, I would sit on the shore looking over the mud and try to see it as Mrs. Emily did.

The snow was falling in large wet flakes. "It looks about at its end," my mother had already said. We had just gotten over the excitement of school closings. She was putting on her things to go outside. My brother was out there cleaning off the driveway. Dad was upstairs still getting ready to go to work.

I put my things on, too, and went out to help them. My mother was sweeping the front steps off with the broom so I picked up the other shovel and started clearing the sidewalk. The snow was not deep but it was always the wet, heavy kind, difficult to shovel after someone has trampled on it and nearly impossible after it has begun to melt. My brother looked up from the drivewayfor a few minutes to rest.

All of the people in the neighborhood seemed to be outside. We were working together to dig ourselves out of the snow. Some of the kids were out in the streets with their sleds. A snowball smashed in front of me, a second broke on the shovel. I looked around, but there were so many people in the streets and on the sidewalks that I couldn't tell who had done it. Behind me, the Rev. Turman shoveled the end of his driveway, but he was too intent on clearing the snow to have done it.

It was something that Hubert would have done. I stopped shoveling for a moment and was about to look up to see if he was there before I remembered that he had died the summer before. The neighborhood had talked about it for weeks. One day he had been out on the ladder painting the trim, the next day the ambulance had pulled up their drive and taken

him to the hospital. No one ever tall ed much to Mrs. Emily, so he was buried before we knew he had died. My mother found out from Marcie when she came to visit a few weeks lat r with her little boy. It was hard to believe, no reception at the house after the funeral, no comings and goings of friends and relatives offering their condolences. Not a word. Mrs. Emily stayed in her house for days, sometimes a week or more at a time, so we had missed the whole thing.

Nothing else was talked of for weeks. We were angry at Mrs. Emily for letting Hubert die without us. We were hurt that she did not let us grieve with her. Hubert always seemed to be somewhere in the neighborhood, either in his own yard or in the street. Without him, our disapproval of Mrs. Emily went unchecked. We had been determined, I believe, to leave the woman to herself, if that's the way she wanted it. And, we had represented to ourselves, that was what she did want, obviously.

I leaned for a moment on the shovel. The snow was terribly heavy. It would probably melt all day, then freeze solid at night. Mrs. Emily's yard was the only place where the snow still lay in smooth white heaps. It coated the roof of her house and sparkled on the windows. Snow outlined the bare branches and decorated the spruce. Soft light shone from one of the back rooms. A horse-driven sleigh could have come up the drive. It was a scene that would have been on a cookie tin.

"You'll freeze out here if you stay still too long," my mother poked the end of her broom into the back of my coat.

I bent down again to shovel the walk. I had almost broken through to the driveway. My brother had already finished the drive and gone in to get warm. My mother scraped the car windshield.

There were no more snowballs thrown my way, but I could not stop thinking of Hubert. How much he hated shoveling that drive. It was a semi-circle that arched at the front door with two entrances from the street. On one side, the drive branched off to a one-car garage that Hubert had told us was once a carriage house.

It would take him all day to clear that drive, and he would do it, too. Most of the time we would help him. It wasn't quite as unselfish an act as it seemed. We always wanted him in our snowball fights, and he would come after the drive was cleared.

I shoveled the last chunks of snow on the walk. My dad came out of the house buttoning his coat and putting on his gloves. He gave me a kiss on the cheek that smelled of coffee and told me not to study too hard on my day off. He thought things like that were funny. Always said how lucky we were to be kids.

"Close the gates for me, will you?" he said, making sure I answered that I would before he slammed the car door. He was afraid that Ginger would get loose and "terrorize the neighborhood."

She might corner someone and bark with the hair at the back of her neck standing on end, but I believe she would never bite.

"All dogs will bite," Dad would remind us.

I closed the gates after he pulled the car out of the drive. He got down to

the end of the street easily and turned onto the boulevard. Everyone had already gone inside. That was the way it was in our neighborhood it seemed. Either everyone was out or no one was. Still, I was not ready to go in.

I looked back up at Mrs. Emily's house but could not recall the cookie tin image. It just looked like Mrs. Emily's house to me, perhaps on a day that Hubert had overslept or something. I walked to their yard with my shovel slung over my shoulder. My fingers were tingling inside of my wet glove.

At first, I shoveled the snow in the street where the driveway came out. Then, I worked my way up the drive to the sidewalk, and before I was committed to doing the job, I was aleady in the yard. The violence of the exercise warmed and insulated me from the silence of the entire street. I worked fast, conscious only of the rhythm beat out by the movement of my arms and the scrape of the shovel on the pavement. I had worked one path all the way up to the doors of the carriage house and turned to go back down the other side of the drive before I heard Mrs. Emily.

"Excuse me, excuse me," she said from the front steps. Her eyes puzzled over me. Perhaps she did not recognize me under all of those clothes.

I could feel the cold as I stopped to look up. I was losing my resolve. It was easier to just keep going. I scraped the shovel on the pavement again.

"I can't pay you," I heard her say distinctly. She dangled the fact in front of me so that I would leave. "I can't pay."

I didn't know what I would do if she yelled at me. I kept on working hoping that she would go back inside.

"Did you hear what I said?" she called from the steps.

I broke the rhythm of the shoveling enough to wave at her without looking up. I did not stop until I was back into the street again. It was time to go inside for lunch, but I stayed out there to clear a path from the drive to her front door. I even shoveled the brick steps, there were ten of them, up to the door. They weren't as clear as if I had used a broom, but I did them anyway. I dared her to come out and offer me money.

When I had cleared the top step, I swung the shovel over my shoulder and walked down the cleared sidewalk and driveway. In the street, I surveyed my work. It wasn't as much as Hubert usually cleared, but it was enough to get the car out and let the mailman through.

I walked back to my house, exhausted. I wondered what everyone else would say. I didn't care. What could they say? "Why?"

I would tell them she paid me.

It was the summer that tropical storm Agnes blew through the suburbs of Baltimore. The storm flooded our woods, raining down water that collected in pools up to our back porch. When the three days of wind and rain were over, everyone came outside to survey the damage.

The storm had pasted wet leaves to the side and front of the house and on the windows. It had strewn tree branches on the street. Rev. Turman's apple tree, which had been leaning over at quite an angle for a few years, had been blown to the ground. We were lucky that none of the power lines or street lights had fallen over.

The biggest damage that we sustained was due to Mrs. Emily. One of her blue spruces had fallen onto our fence and knocked it down.The tree was only about twelve feet tall, it was young for a tree. Its needles still dripped from the rain, and the branches looked too soft to have caused damage. Our car had been spared, but about an eight-foot section of anchor fence would need to be replaced. It was an inconvenience, too. Dad would not allow Ginger to go outside unless one of us had her on the leash.

A lot of the people in the neighborhood were outside. They were raking their yards and washing the leaves from the side of their houses. My mother got up on a step-ladder to wash our windows. I think we were all waiting for Mrs. Emily to come out. Dad had already made up his mind to confront her. Everyone wanted to see what would happen.

By mid-afternoon the remains of the storm had been cleared away. Mrs. Emily still had not come outside. Some of the men gathered in front of our house to talk to Dad. Mr. Stringfellow wanted to hoist it off our fence and into Mrs. Emily's yard. He was a tall, thin man who liked to use his strength. Charlie wanted to be just like him.

My father didn't want anyone to try it, though. He was afraid someone might get hurt. Rev. Turman was inclined to agree.

"Let the professionals take care of it," Dad said. He was a blue collar man who had worked his way into management. Since then, he thought that physical work was best done by laborers, which he no longer was.

"Why didn't you let them help you?" my mother asked Dad once they had given up on Mrs. Emily and gone in the house.

"Florey, if one of them gets hurt on our property, technically, they can sue us. I don't think any of them ever would, but you just don't know." He was enjoying a beer after all of the yard work. "Then, too, if we break anything on Mrs. Emily's side, you don't know what she might do. There's a lot of damage over there already, and I don't want her to think we did it by throwing that tree over the fence. Half of the thing still looks rooted in the ground, anyway. You don't know how much force we'd have to apply to move it over to her side. Besides, Rev. Turman agreed with me, and he's got more going on in his head than half of the others put together."

"Well, what are you going to do then? We can't just wait for that old woman to take care of it. She doesn't care about the mess left in her yard. Caroline says she thinks she saw Mrs. Emily heading back into them woods. What she'd be doing back there, I can't imagine."

"How about if I called your brother-in-law. He could tell me what rights I have to remove that tree," Dad said.

"Melvin would know," my mother said. She put her tea cup down on the telephone table and looked for the number in the address book. "Here, you talk to him," she said when she had found it. "I wouldn't know all what to ask."

My uncle was a lawyer to whom everyone in the family turned for legal advice. As it turned out, Dad could have the tree removed, and Uncle Melvin would notify Mrs. Emily that she would have to pay the expense. He told Dad to call his insurance company about replacing the fence.

As soon as he was off the phone, Dad got the yellow pages and called a tree removal service. They told him that the storm had given them more business than they could handle, but they would get to it as soon as they could. He was not happy with their answer, but after calling around to different places and repeating his story two or three times, he finally chose one and gave them Mrs. Emily's address.

My brother and I shared the inconvenience of taking the dog out on the leash. I couldn't believe that such a trivial thing as this could cause so much talk and worry. Days went by without a word with Mrs. Emily. We figured that she would have gotten my uncle's letter by now. Dad debated about whether he should go over and talk to her about it. When he finally did decide to go, no one answered the door.

Before the end of the week, the tree removal men did come. We were playing spud in the street with a soccer ball. Ginger had been kept in the basement this week, found our football, and torn it to shreds. Charlie had brought out his soccer ball so that we could play.

The tree removal men parked their van in front of Mrs. Emily's house. She didn't answer the door for them either, but my mother came out and talked to them for a few minutes. We gathered around and watched them take their chain saws out. They filled the saws with fuel that stank when it burned in the motor. The noise was awful when they had two saws going. They started at the bottom, cutting off the biggest limbs first and throwing them in a pile.

Missy touched my shoulder and pointed toward Mrs. Emily's house. She was coming down the steps. One quick swing of her arm motioned them to stop, and the men turned off their chain saws.

Though our ears still rang from the buzz of the saw motors, we heard Mrs. Emily telling them to get off her property. She was going to call the police if they did not leave.

"This is my tree. I didn't call you to come and remove it, and I am not paying for your services." Mrs. Emily's eyes darted around more than usual. She wore a sweater although it was the end of June.

"Let's go," Missy said. The others agreed, but I couldn't stop watching. The men were packing up. Mrs. Emily was looking at where they had sawed and then at the roots of the damaged tree. "We don't want you to get in trouble," Missy whispered close to my ear.

I wanted to tell Mrs. Emily that I was sorry that this had happened, but I was losing my chance. Agitated, I took the ball from Charlie's hands and bounced it hard on the sidewalk a few times. The tree men drove away.

"What are all of you standing around for?" Mrs. Emily looked from face to face of our group. "Go on, go play." She walked back toward the carriage house.

My friends were nervous, they wanted to go. They turned me around and started to walk back to the street. "Come on," they said, "you heard her. Let's go."

"No," I said, bouncing the ball hard on the sidewalk and letting it fall among them. I went over to the fallen tree. Mrs. Emily had brought a

bucket of water and a shovel from the carriage house.

I took the shovel from Mrs. Emily. She had nothing more to do than to pour the water in the hole among the tree roots. I dug out the softened dirt.

Charlie was the first to come back. He was strong, like his father, and tugging at the trunk, lifted it an inch from the grund. The others joined him. By the end of the day, we had raised the tree, replanted the roots, and pounded stakes in the ground. The wind was never going to blow it over again.

Most of the others in the neighborhood were against what we had done. It was a shame, they said, that all of that work had been done for a tree that wasn't going to live through the summer. Besides, one of us could have gotten hurt. Mrs. Emily should have stopped us. I didn't get punished for what we had done, but I felt as if we were all waiting for the tree to die.

Mrs. Emily took care that the spruce was watered and mulched. She even tarred the cuts left by the tree man. The people of our neighborhood were much more careful about Mrs. Emily from then on. The talk about her stopped. They even started to wave at her when they saw her.

Once the tree got through the first change of seasons, no one said anything about it much, except to remark, occasionally, how beautiful it had grown, then to talk of other things.

Corey Thrasher

First Son

Among the moth ash, your service stripe lays
buried in the drawer like an old tongue.
Mourning hands, unfolded from flags,
press their palms over closed eyes.

At the news of your death
when the words came racing up the wire,
eyes cracked like porcelain dolls.
Now the pieces are everywhere:
in the food at Christmas,
on a shelf in the medicine chest,
in our pillows,
in our throats —

I rend the God Book for it.
For years after, I would read your war letters;
keep them in a box in my roll top desk.
Now they steep in bible print and wait for mother to drink.
She pines with a crucifix close to mouth
while I burn my last rosary;
the pastic beads pop like corn.

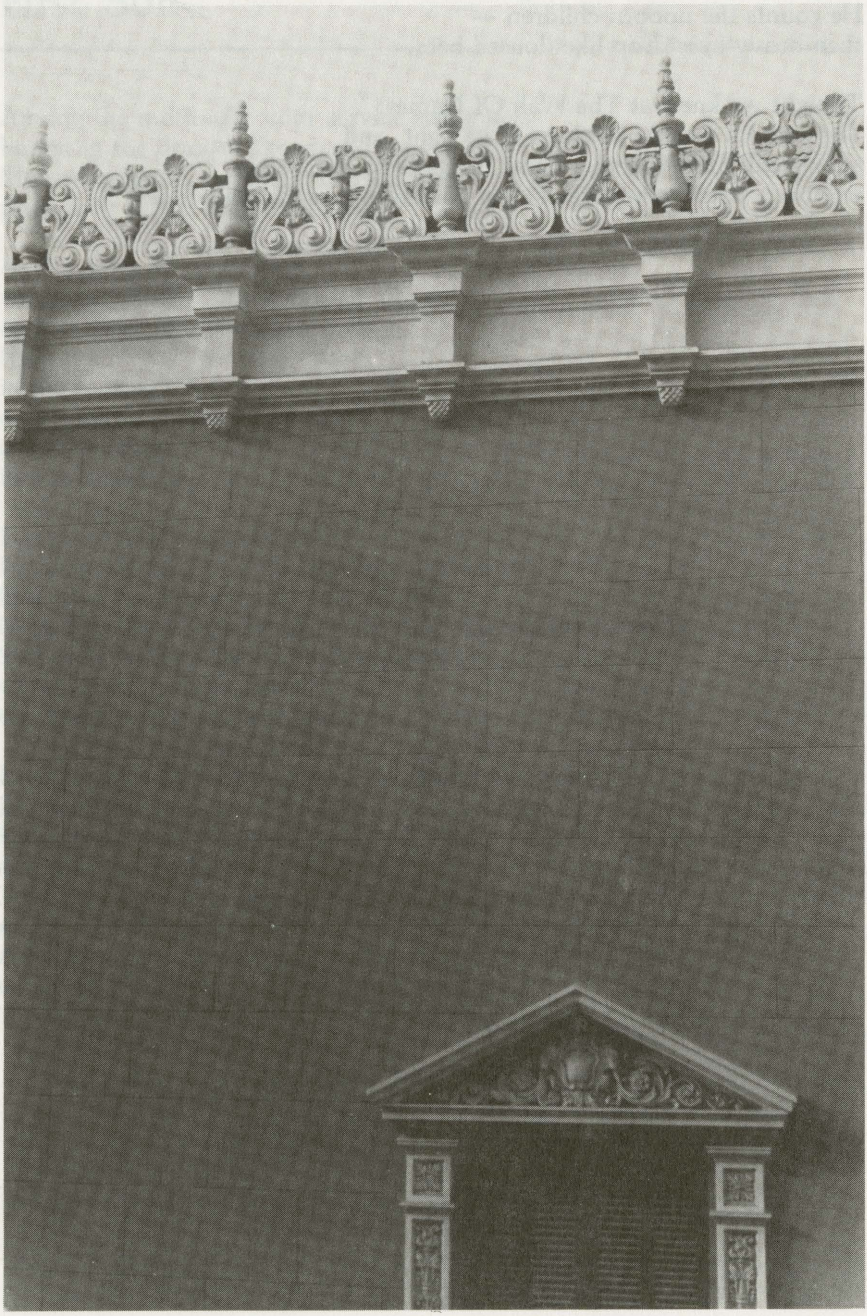
I wear my combat boots when childhood hits a hard
jab in my face.
Keepsakes pour like sick gravy,
and I spoon in that sad puddle.
The dog tags you wore
swim in the bowl of a helmet,
and our sister, our tough drugstore blonde,
works to rub the scars off them.

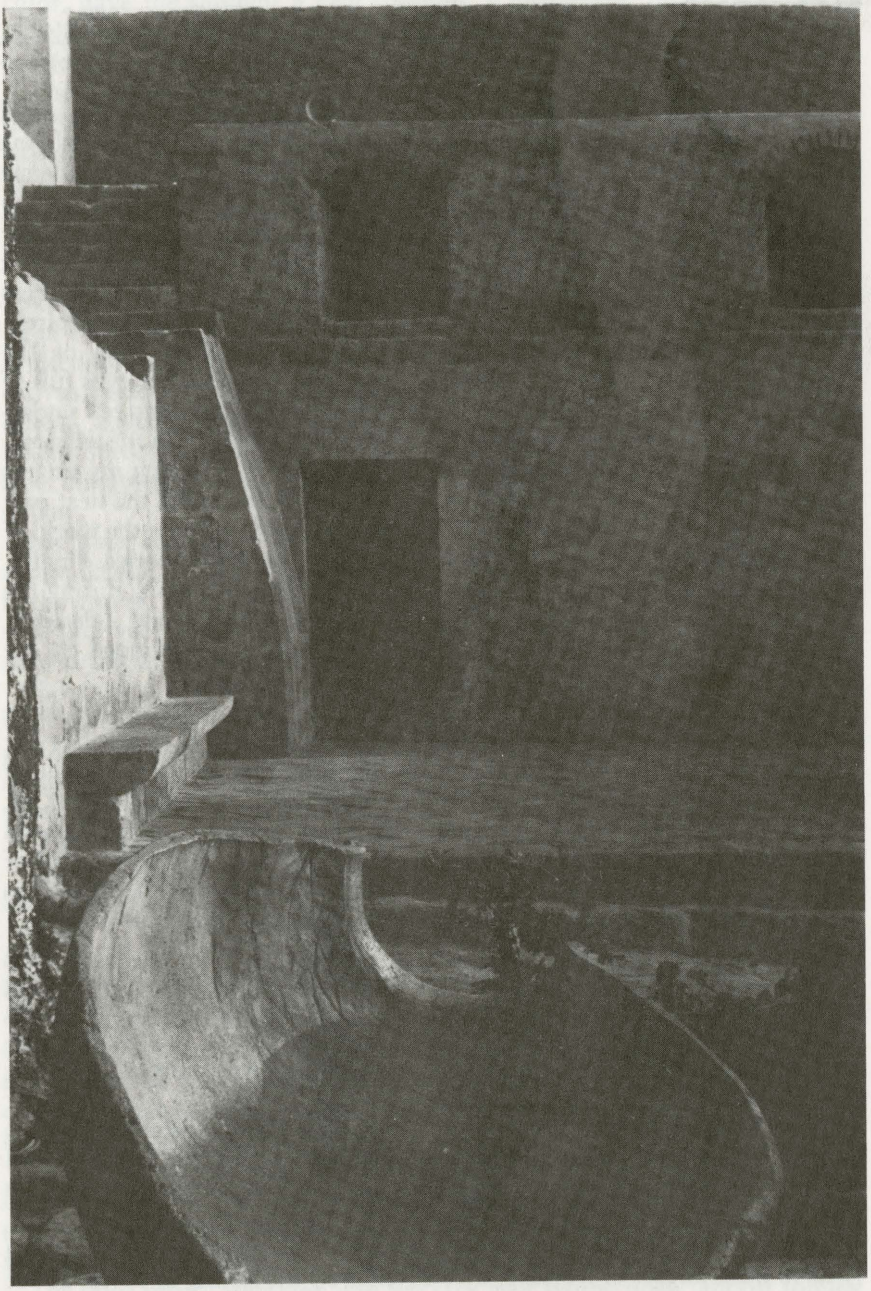
Only father can stomach your room.
His fingers pull the bullets from your side.
He pumps your blood through like a messiah.
He counts the unborn children —
then heavy eyes drop like doused bees.

Tonight we kneel at The Wall Of Names.
The smooth marble holds us in its light, and
at this still place where a name hangs onto our voices,
we touch your twenty years, lost somewhere in all that stone.

Laura Bellows-Ancasi

Photographs





Colin Winterbottom

My Love

The cold metallic escalator slowly lifted me above the darkened underground tunnels through which subway cars had carried me downtown. The noon day sun hit me suddenly; its probing rays made me wince. Defending my eyes with a hand held to my forehead, I looked up to find the sidewalks bustling with Saturday tourists out to catch the sights or shop on this warm summer day. I stepped carefully from the ascending stairway and began to walk, my eyes slowly adapting to the new brightness and my mind losing the sullen thoughts the subway's tunnels had inspired.

A solitary mannequin, poised high in the window of one of the "fashionable" shops I passed, seemed to watch me, its vacant eyes full of curiosity. I stopped, looking up to the tuxedo clad dummy, and felt underdressed in my pinstripe business suit. I noticed my reflection in the window, and leaned closer to take one last inventory of myself. Wetting my fingers on my tongue, I attacked the few defiant hairs which resisted the neat part on the left side of my head. The dark circles under my eyes told the world of my anxious, sleepless night. I could only hope no one would notice. Finally, I straightened my tie, which I had loosened to prevent choking during the ride from the suburbs into Washington. I had done what I could, I decided. No more stalling. I stepped back from the window and continued on my walk.

As my body carried towards the church, my mind searched for some comfort or meaning in the unexpected recent events. Five years after my family had cut me out of its life, I was startled to receive an invitation to my sister's wedding. I looked back to the day of my excommunication, but felt only numbness. The vague images in my head seemed foreign, like old photos in a stranger's album. I tried to tell myself that I had grown out of the pain of that separation; the new life I had made gave me the strength to purge old pains from my memory. Yet this invitation made me uneasy. I was unsure how to respond. Perhaps I should feel hopeful, or perhaps angry. Or perhaps I should feel redeemed, like the death row inmate who, on the proof of his innocence, shakes his fist to the world and cries "You see, I was right!" As I looked to the bright sunlight on the pale steps climbing up to the stone, gothic church, the only feeling I was certain of was my own anxiety.

The entrance was crowded with guests milling about: distantly familiar faces of lost uncles and aunts, forgotten neighbors. Unwilling to mingle and eager for explanation, I found an usher and asked to be taken to see my sister.

I followed him into the church sanctum. I was, as I usually am on my rare visits to these houses of worship, awe-stricken by the feeling of power about

the place. Thin columns rose from amidst the walnut pews like spires ascending to the sky. Along the ceiling intricately detailed arches wove together with a gracious artistry. The stained glass windows, bright yet deep with color, gave the sunlight a new strength, a new glory. Its grand scale, its angelic beauty imposed on me, belittled me, shamed me. I felt again an uncomfortable tinge of the guilt which had possessed me in younger days.

The usher led me out the side of the room and down a dark stairwell to the basement. He opened the first door, which I thought at first was a closet. He indicated that I was to enter. I did not. An odd feeling of distrust made me hesitant. Again, he raised his hand, pointing into the room. I defied my instincts and stepped slowly through the door. I turned to watch, a nervous tightness clenching my throat, as he closed the door behind me.

The rays of sunlight streaming into the dark room through the single window illuminated the particles of dust which floated in the air, coming to settle in thick layers over the stacks of books cluttered about the shelves and broken tables which all but filled the room. In one corner, an old sheet of canvas, which had been tossed carelessly over a damaged statue of the Maddonna, added a musty, mildewed scent to the room. A crack in the full length mirror, running from its upper left corner to the middle of its right side, disrupted the bride's reflection as she tried to adjust her uncomfortable gown.

My sister was aware of my presence from the moment I walked into the room. At one point during the minutes I stood there in silence, our eyes met in the mirror, but she pretended not to notice, returning her attention to the sprays of baby's breath woven into her braided blond hair. It was not until I reluctantly whispered "Susan?" that she acknowledged me.

She turned dramatically from the mirror. "Baby brother!" she cried, a term of endearment she had never used before. She widened her eyes, dropped her jaw, and threw her arms into the air as she came forward to hug me. I tried to match her grand show of enthusiasm, but found hugging her as warm and human as embracing a side of beef.

"Nervous?" I asked as she pulled away from me.

"I suppose," she responded, returning to her mirror to adjust the lace on her unusual looking gown.

"Boy, I would be nervous," I commented, embarrassed at hearing my over-rehearsed line. "A wedding. Imagine that." I was trying to inspire the kind of personal, candid discussion I had hoped our new adult relationship would produce. "Imagine *my* wedding day." As I looked down to the ring on my left hand, distant, dreamy images broke through my anxiety. "That sure would be something, wouldn't it? If only my family and my friends could all come together like this to celebrate my love." I sighed weakly and looked up to my sister in the mirror. "Isn't being in love great?"

She turned to me slowly, calculating. "What makes you so sure I'm in love?" As she turned I saw for the first time that the profusion of white lace exploding from her waist was intended to hide her belly, round and swollen with expected life.

The door nearly slammed into my face as it swung open, almost forcing

me against the wall at my back. My mother marched in, with force and determination as if she were on a mission from God. My father trailed her slowly. Unnoticed, I watched as the distantly familiar characters played before me.

"Oh Susan. Susan, Susan!" she began. "That David of yours is a mess. After all that time I pleaded with him just to cut his hair, he hasn't. He has it all pulled back into a ponytail. And his tuxedo! It's absolutely dreadful! Oh, forget it. I don't want to talk about him.

"But Susan," she continued, forcing a pleasant tone into her voice, "aren't you the vision of beauty?" She feigned a smile as she tugged forcefully at the lace over my sister's belly. "What ever you do, though, don't stand in profile."

Watching my mother lecture my sister, with my father standing beside, his head hanging down and his shoulders hunched forward, I felt as though I was not actually there. I was under hypnosis, watching a vision, a memory from a long forgotten previous life. I had changed so much in my new life, but nothing had changed with them. I had built foundations of strength and security beneath me, and not until this moment had I recognized the primary crack which threatened to topple years of growth.

Only my sister's fixed stare tied me to the reality of the moment. A cold grin grew slowly on her face.

"What is it, Susan?" my mother asked. "What are you smiling about?" My mother's head turned slowly, mechanically, as if she were following a physical line from my sister's glaring eyes to my pale face.

A look of disgust covered my mother's face. My father looked back and forth between the three of us, glaring finally at my sister. "Good God, Susan," he yelled. "How dare you bring him here!" He avoided me as he rushed angrily out the door. My mother gasped, threw her head back, and followed him out. I could only stand still, frozen as my sister's stinging eyes and mocking laughter told me all I needed to know. I had not been invited to rejoin broken ties, not to reunite with a loving family. My sister simply wanted to remind my parents: she may be single and pregnant, but as least she was not *me*.

I wanted to scream out in pain. I wanted to strike my sister, I wanted to cry, I wanted to curse, but I felt paralyzed. All my reactionary impulses piled in on one another, and none could come out of the pile to act.

A blind panic finally took my feet and I ran from the room. I ran as if from a fear of death, up the stairs and up the aisle, past the crowded pews, and out of the church. I ran along the city streets, winning curious looks from passers by. All of the way home, in the crowded subway car, I was consumed by a smoldering rage. The rage was silent to the outside world, but its many voices roared through my head. I became lost in the melee of a thousand questions and a thousand pains, screaming from one side of my brain to another. The sanity I had come to take for granted seemed all at once fragile. I looked to the blank, lifeless faces around me on the train, and wanted to grab someone by the shoulders and shake him violently, shouting to him "Don't you see? Are you all blind to the madness going on?" All the

while I was actually hoping someone else might do this to me — shake me by the shoulders, jerking my head about, and silencing the maddening voices echoing through my brain.

I arrived home to find Michael in the kitchen, leaning over a sink of dirty dishes.

"Scott!" he called, smiling broadly as he turned his attention to me. "You're back early. How did it go?" I wanted to cry out, I wanted to tell him the whole agonizing story in one spastic, broken, anger-ridden sentence. I jerked my mouth open, but could say nothing.

"Looks like it didn't go too well." He dried his hands and stepped close to me. "Come on," he said, loosening the tie still tight around my neck, "you can tell me all about it." He led me to the living room, where we sat on the sofa, side by side.

"I don't know where to begin," I said. "It was a trap. The whole thing was a trick. That bitch!" I yelled, surprised by the furor in my own voice. "I should have known better."

"Oh, Scott. I am so sorry." Michael lay his hands on my shoulders. His gentle massage lifted the tension from my jangled nerves.

"I just feel so . . . I just want to . . ." I stammered."Damn it! I don't know."

"It's OK. Just try to calm down." He wrapped his arms around me. "You don't have to say anything. I understand." My tense muscles began to relax, and I lay my weight into his arms.

"She doesn't even love the guy," I complained.

"Whatever happens, Scott," he whispered, pressing his lips to my forehead, "just remember, I love you."

Diane Vance

I Am The Woman Who Thinks About Everything

after Judy Grahn

I am drinking in the bathtub again
the glass sweating on the white edge
the liquor warm and soothing
in the steam that makes a fog
but I cannot make the water hot enough
so I fill and refill the tub
wanting to feel heat in my bones, so cold
wanting to sweat this grief from me.
I am the woman who thinks about everything.
I lie in the water and listen to nothing
but I imagine the two of you and I know,
because I have been with you both,
how it is your bodies will move in the dark
how it is you will hold each other after.
The two of you erase me
as I erase myself drinking in the water
wishing for a bottle of seconals,
a way into the fog,
a way out of this knowledge
that we can call each other lover, sister,
and swear there is no damage.
It doesn't matter that I can say
I did not deserve this
or that I loved you both beyond
what we should give or take from each other.
My hands are empty and I feel
only to become numb.
My body is clenched and though
I haven't been touched in months and miss it
I am afraid I would break
easily as glass, the grief spilling
from me, screaming from my throat.
I hold myself tight against
whatever comes next. I am the woman
who thinks about everything.
Is there a power in this?

Gauguin

No one traveled farther to claim paradise,
to the pink sands and bright red sea
the warm brown breadfruit women offering everything
up to Gauguin, painter of dreams
and to you, viewer of the sacred objects.

There are girls in the green and purple shadows,
it does not matter if they gaze at you or away,
you can nearly smell them as they sit
acquiescent and beautifully vacant islands
willing in the golden light.

He believed the artist must remain a child.
Tehamana and Annah were thirteen when he took them
Pahura and Vaeoho Marie Rose, fourteen —
naked and available in the lush
green and pink of his landscapes.

Proclaiming himself child he fucked virgins
and said they were all the same while
he painted them invisible in the sunlight.
Take Tehamana take Vaeoho take Pahura take Annah,
he wrote, it is the same.